

Foreign Policy Strategies for Declining Hegemony: Searching for the Balance between Costs and Involvement

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Abstract

The article explores and analyzes the foreign policy strategies of a declining hegemon. For this purpose, it develops an analytical framework for the classification of the strategies based on the two variables, costs and involvement. While amount of costs required to be spent in order to attain the goals of a certain strategy affects a hegemon's power, and involvement represents the hegemon's ability to achieve desired outcomes through participation in international relations, the variables empirically express the two attributes of a hegemon as defined in the theories of international relations - power and willingness to be a hegemon. Therefore, beyond classification of strategies, the analytical framework illustrates how implementation of each strategy affects the attributes of a hegemon. Based on the framework, the article defines the most optimal foreign policy of a declining hegemon by discovering the one that minimally affects the attributes of a hegemon by enabling it to preserve high involvement in relatively lower costs.

Keywords: declining hegemon, foreign policy strategies, hegemon, hegemonic system, isolationism, multilateralism, unipolar system.

Introduction

Realist theories of international relations suggest analysis of the international system based on the existing distribution of power among its constitutive actors; the tendencies of a unipolar, also known as hegemonic, bipolar and multipolar international systems and impact of different arrangements of power distribution within the international system on states' behavior and patterns of their interactions (for classical statement, see Waltz, 1979). This paper focuses on the decline of the unipolar system. Namely, it inquires and analyzes the possible foreign policy strategies of a declining hegemon based on the theoretical arguments presented in the literature of international relations regarding the essence of hegemony and attributes of a hegemon; relationship between power and influence; tendencies of the unipolar system and its impact on the patterns of state behavior; conditions stipulating the decline of a hegemon; tendencies of the process of decline; patterns of state behavior and state interactions in the declining hegemonic system as well as the post-hegemonic world. Herewith, the paper is limited to the discussion of foreign policy strategies that a declining hegemon faces in case when a multipolar system formation is anticipated because of the decline of a hegemonic system. Application of the analytical framework the paper establishes for the classification of declining hegemon's foreign policy strategies, is also limited to the peaceful systemic change that implies the change of power distribution

within the international system without a war between the declining hegemon and its challenger(s).

The article establishes an analytical framework, which enables the classification of a declining hegemon's foreign policy strategies, consequently, the most optimal strategy is ascertained and the mechanisms for implementing this strategy are defined.

Establishment of an analytical framework: An analytical framework for the classification of hegemon's foreign policy strategies is established based on the variables that empirically express the two attributes of hegemon – power and willingness that follow from the definitions of hegemony, indicated within the theories of international relations. These variables are referred as costs and involvement. When allocated on the two-dimensional axes, the costs measure the power required to be spent in order to carry out a hegemon's certain strategies. On the other hand, bearing in mind willingness to participate, the involvement measures the hegemon's ability of achieving desired outcomes in international relations. Therefore, involvement is measured on the merits of outcomes achieved throughout participation. Allocated on the axis this variable illustrates the extent of involvement a hegemon can retain in case of each strategy.

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Classification of Strategies: Classification of a declining hegemon's foreign policy strategies is achieved on the basis of the two-dimensional axes, formed by using above-mentioned/the variables – costs and involvement (see Figure 1). The axes depict four possible strategies for the declining hegemon classified on the basis of four possible groupings/balance of the variables: 1. high involvement, low costs; 2. high involvement, high costs; 3. low involvement, low costs; 4. low involvement, high costs. The strategies are labeled as multilateralism, hegemony, isolationism and declining hegemony.

Revealing optimal strategy: Based on the theoretical arguments presented in the literature of international relations, a strategy referred to as multilateralism prevails as an optimal strategy and is described in detail. Multilateralism has inherent balance between involvement and costs and represents the only strategy which enables the hegemon to achieve higher degree of involvement with lower costs.

Implementation mechanisms of the optimal strategy: After having defined a declining hegemon's optimal strategy, the next part of the article focuses on development of implementation mechanisms for this strategy. The optimal strategy defined in the frameworks of the article is oriented at lowering costs in order to retain relative power and delay its descent in a way that hegemon's ability to retain its high-degree involvement within the international relations is not jeopardized. The main mechanisms, which can be used to implement such strategy involve two major directions. On the one hand, this entails rejection of certain commitments, because of this the article categorizes threats into three levels. The cases in which a hegemon will need to be ready to act unilaterally or avoid such actions in order to lower its costs will be separated.

Another essential direction to implement the strategy involves increasing the participation of other powerful states, including the rising powers to deal with common problems and threats, and eliminating free-riding from their side. For this purpose, suggested mechanisms, according to the article, relate to persuasion and provision of positive incentives.

The mechanisms described in the framework of the article differ from the mechanisms indicated in the existing literature of international relations in three main ways. First, the mechanisms described in the paper differ from the ones illustrated in the existing limited literature, where implementation mechanisms of a declining hegemon's action strategies are presented in a theoretical and generalized way (major works that theoretically discuss a declining hegemonic system or strategies for a declining hegemon include Gilpin, 1981; Gilpin, 1987; Keohane, 1984; Jervis, 2009; Kennedy, 1987; Legro, 2005; Modelski, 1987; Mastanduno, 1997; Ikenberry, Mastanduno, and Wohlforth, 2009; Treisman, 2004; Posen, 2011; Mearsheimer, 2001). Second, although there is much literature available about the existing hegemon's foreign policy strategies and their implementation mechanisms, they differ from the ones described in this article, as they are specific and applicable to the current hegemon – representing specific recommendations for the USA. For instance, this part of the literature presents recommendations such as the withdrawal of US troops from Europe,

which of course when generalizing implies reconsidering hegemon's commitments to decrease its costs in order to avoid reduction of relative power. However, when generalizing recommendations in similar literature, the challenges emerge due to the gaps such as the absence of categorization of commitments defining what type of commitments a hegemon may or may not reject. Therefore, in the article, unlike the papers fitted to the specific hegemon, theoretical mechanisms are described, which could be used as recommendations for other declining hegemon's that meet the necessary conditions set out in this article. Finally, the individual mechanisms of implementation of optimal strategy, proposed in the scope of the paper, are found in existing literature, but in a different context, and serve different goals. For example, Edward Carr (1946) as well as Robert Gilpin (1981) suggest appeasement as a strategy for a declining hegemon to be used towards a rising challenger. Strategy of appeasement as well as the above-mentioned strategy of multilateralism implies making certain concessions when dealing with rising powers. However, making concessions as implementation mechanism in the two strategies differ in terms of their timing, motivation and final goals. In case of appeasement, the act of conceding represents a part of the process of surrendering the power by a declining hegemon – an alternative to a hegemonic war, and in most cases takes place when the process of decreasing the relative power reaches its critical point and a declining hegemon practically becomes no longer able to resist a challenger. In case of referring to the strategy of multilateralism – the act of conceding to the system's other powerful states, including the rising powers, represents a positive incentivisation mechanism, which is used by a hegemon aiming to suppress free-riding and increase involvement of powerful states in terms of protecting the international order and providing stability to the international system. In this case, the final goal of a hegemon is to lower costs and retain a relative power gap.

Development of an Analytical Framework and Classification of Strategies

In the literature of international relations, a hegemon is identified as a state that has significantly more capabilities than any other and its security cannot be meaningfully threatened by others (for a classical statement see: Jervis, 2009; Ikenberry et al., 2009; Waltz, 1979; Keohane & Nye, 1977; Gilpin, 1981). Although, power is not a sole habitual attribute for hegemony. A hegemon is also a state that undertakes a responsibility for the stability of international system and operation of international institutions, provision of legitimacy to the international norms and standards and formation of international agenda. Hence, for a country to be classified as a hegemon, it has to have two attributes: power and willingness to carry out the above-mentioned functions and introduce a rule-based order to international system. A combined empirical expression of the given attributes such as the power and willingness relate to the outcomes achieved by the hegemon in international relations, which further is referred within the framework of the paper as involvement. Bearing in mind willingness to participate, the involvement

features the ability of achieving desired goals at the international level. Therefore, the involvement is not measured on the merits of active participation within international relations, but is based on the merits of outcomes achieved throughout participation.

A hegemonic classification relates to the state, which possesses both attributes at the same time - power as well as willingness. The history of international relations as well as the present time endorses the notion that either of the attributes is not enough on its own. On the one hand, Russia possessing willingness, which is not reinforced with the appropriate power, is incapable to have an extensive impact on international relations as much as it would like to. Although, on the other hand, to consider the twentieth century's USA prior to the Second World War, despite being superior in terms of power compared to other countries, it did not have the willingness to be included in international politics. For this reason, as such USA of that period is not regarded as the hegemon of the international relations system at that time.

As a hegemon is defined in terms of power and willingness, in order to undermine its status either one of them or both of them need to be weakened. On the one hand, a hegemon may lose its relative power that will eventually undermine its involvement irrespective of its willingness to participate in international relations, or at some point, hegemon may refer to isolationism, refuse to fulfill a hegemon's functions and exclude itself from international relations. In both cases, a hegemon descends its status and position in international relations.

What factors undermine (attributes of) a hegemon and lead to its decline? Two realist theories – structural realism and hegemonic stability theory explain the factors that lead to the decline of a hegemon. Classical statement of the arguments of structural realism belongs to Kenneth N. Waltz while the arguments of the hegemonic stability theory on the issue have been developed by Robert Gilpin.

According to Waltz, "in the light of structural theory, unipolarity appears as the least durable of international configurations. This is so for two main reasons. One is that dominant powers take on too many tasks beyond their own borders, thus weakening themselves in the long run" (Waltz, 2000). Reason for this for Waltz is the misuse of power which is stipulated by the fact that it is not checked/balanced by any other state or coalition of states. Same argument is developed by Robert Jervis. As he states, permissive structure of international relations – in other words, lack of countervailing power, create structural incentives for a hegemon to pursue excessive expansion. According to Jervis, there are four facets to this argument: "First, power is checked most effectively, if not only, by counterbalancing power. ... It follows from the propensity of states to use the power at their disposal that those who are not subject to external restraints tend to feel few restraints at all." Second, state interests expand along with its power. "The unipole can pursue luxuries, and once a state has started to do so, it, like an individual, soon comes to see them as necessities." Third, "the unipole also feels a compulsion to seek more because increased power brings with it new fears. As major threats disappear, people

elevate ones that previously were seen as quite manageable. But there is more to it than psychology. A dominant state acquires interests throughout the globe. ...and it is not only hubris that leads it to be concerned with everything that happens anywhere. The growth of power and influence establishes new positions to be defended." Four, "as Realists stress, even states that are content with the status quo must worry about the future. ... However secure states are, only rarely can they be secure enough, and if they are currently very powerful they will feel strong impulses to act now to prevent a deterioration. ... so even if the unipole is not in danger it may seek to expand rather than accept a loss" (Jervis, 2009).

Waltz's another argument for explaining the short duration of unipolarity is that "even if a dominant power behaves with moderation, restraint, and forbearance, weaker states will worry about its future behavior. ... As nature abhors a vacuum, so international politics abhors unbalanced power. Faced with unbalanced power, some states try to increase their own strength or they ally with others to bring the international distribution of power into balance" (Waltz, 2000).

As to the hegemonic stability theory's arguments, developed by Robert Gilpin, they help to explain why decline occurs after a power has attained a predominant position. As Gilpin states, "Once an equilibrium between the costs and benefits of further change and expansion is reached, the tendency is for the economic costs of maintaining the status quo to rise faster than the economic capacity to support the status quo. ... In order to maintain its dominant position, a state must expend its resources on military forces, the financing of allies, foreign aid, and the costs associated with maintaining the international economy. These protection and related costs are not productive investments; they constitute an economic drain on the economy of the dominant state. Domination, therefore, requires the existence of a continuing economic surplus." According to Gilpin, protection costs increase over time making the preservation of status quo more difficult. "The principal external factor undermining the position of the dominant state is the increasing costs of dominance. ... Increases in the numbers and strengths of rival, challenging powers force the dominant state to expend more resources to maintain its superior military or political position.... Because the dominant power will defend the status quo in its own interest, lesser states have little incentive to pay their "fair" share of these protection costs (the free-rider problem)." Besides, in the long run, world market economy spreads economic growth throughout the international system, diffusing the wealth and factors of growth to the new centers of economic growth. These arguments draw Gilpin to conclude that "Once a society reaches the limits of its expansion, it has great difficulty in maintaining its position and arresting its eventual decline. ... These rising states, on the other hand, enjoy lower costs, rising rates of return on their resources... In time, the differential rates of growth of declining and rising states in the system produce a decisive redistribution of power and result in disequilibrium in the system." (Gilpin, 1981)

Hegemonic stability theory emphasizes hegemon's role in provision of public goods such as international stability and international order and the costs associated with it, and

subsequent free-ride of the rest of the states (key statements include Kindleberger, 1973; Keohane, 1980; Krasner, 1976; Gilpin, 1981; Russett, 1985; Snidal, 1985). In the unipolar international system, a hegemon takes responsibility for the system stability. As a result, a stable international system is developed, where the international institutions function efficiently and international economic and financial cooperation is facilitated due to the existence of rule-based order which is backed up by a hegemon's power and financial resources. In such circumstances, the majority of states benefit from international trading and other type of international cooperation. Certainly, the world order formed through efforts put by a hegemon serves its interests in the first place. However, as time goes by, due to the increase of resources needed to maintain a world order, it starts receiving lessened pure profit from the system it has formed and maintained, whilst other states retain a free ride in terms of continuously benefiting from the system without carrying any extra contribution towards it. At such point, a hegemon starts to lose its relative power in comparison with the rest of the world.

Meanwhile, the states with fast-paced growing power develop a desire to convert their newly attained power into appropriate privileges within international relations. They start questioning a hegemon's special rights and privileges in terms of legitimacy of certain international standards and its role in a process of decision making within international entities. From this point, while the responsibility for providing the costs for the maintenance of the system's stability still relies on a hegemon, the exclusive privileges of the hegemon to lead international relations start to weaken. Questioning of the legitimacy of hegemon's exclusive rights and privileges in international system as well as subsequent weakening of its authority will tempt states to challenge the order and stop conforming with the hegemon which further increases the costs of the maintenance of the international order and accelerates the decline of a hegemony.

In order to retain a status for the maximum period of time, which is expressed by two attributes of power and willingness, declining hegemon's primary objective becomes finding a difficult balance: on the one hand, it should attempt to decrease the costs relating to the 'patronage' (i.e. maintenance of the role of the so-called policeman) of the system, which helps avoiding the exhaustion of its resources and overall power, and on the other hand it should retain its maximum involvement in international relations, which reflects the willingness to participate in international relations considering the capabilities the amount of power provides at given circumstances. A peculiar difficulty of such balance relates to the fact that tighter cost controls lead to the decrease of involvement, whilst an attempt to retain a high degree of involvement implies the increase of expenditures. Two-dimensional axes below present the possible foreign policy strategies of a declining hegemon in terms of different balances for the costs and involvement:

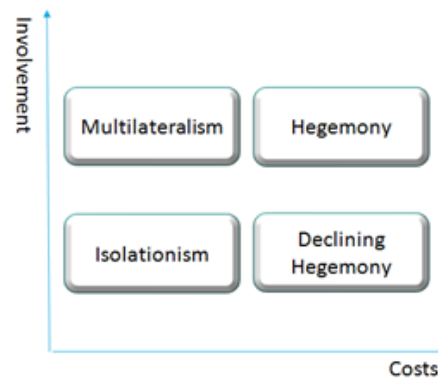


Figure 1: Foreign policy strategies of a declining hegemon

The vertical axis demonstrates involvement, and as mentioned above, is measured in the scope of hegemon's outcomes throughout participation in international relations. Whilst, the horizontal axis demonstrates costs, which carries an influence on a hegemon's power - with high costs a hegemon faces a threat of power exhaustion, while low costs allow it to retain its power. Thus, the axes demonstrate four possible strategies for the hegemon facing a threat of decline: 1. high involvement, low costs; 2. high involvement, high costs; 3. low involvement, low costs; 4. low involvement, high costs. Hence, the headlines for each balance of costs and involvement are based on general policy, which a hegemon will have to follow whenever choosing a certain strategy, or whichever is expected in case of inactivity, in other words if a hegemon does not choose to change its strategy in the beginning of the decline and follows the stream.

Ascertainment of the Optimal Strategy and Its Implementation Mechanisms

From the four possible foreign policy strategies allocated on the axes above, the one entitled as hegemony that implies a balance of high costs and high involvement, represents a strategy a capable hegemon follows. A hegemon's initiative to provide the system with stability and efficient functioning requires a high degree involvement as well as high costs. Respectively, this strategy cannot be an appropriate choice for a declining hegemon, which should be attempting to preserve its resources. At the same time, inactivity or in other words a choice not to reconsider its strategy during a dynamic fall of its relative power, leads the declining hegemon to a threat of discovering itself in a condition where despite high costs, high degree of involvement is impossible to maintain. If the hegemon, whose relative power starts to decline still continues supporting stability with its own costs, then it will accelerate a decline of its relative power.

It is important to highlight that even though a hegemon's costs may still be high in the strategy of declining hegemony, its involvement in international relations will gradually weaken. As already stated, the so-called hegemonic peace fosters a favorable environment for cooperation, development of international trading and financial relations. It is cor-

rect to suggest that the world order shaped by a hegemon serves in the first place its own interests. However, peaceful international relations also provide decent opportunities for other states to develop and grow through either international trading or any other type of cooperation. In proportion with the rise of the power of other large states, increases their demand to find appropriate prestige within international relations, become more actively involved in formation of international agenda and decision-making processes. As a result, states with growing powers start questioning a hegemon's exclusive rights and privileges, for which it becomes increasingly difficult for a hegemon to achieve desired outcomes through international negotiation or other decision making processes while it still bears the costs to keep the world order intact. From this point, a hegemon comes across certain obstacles in terms of providing leadership with an aim of organizing collective actions, achieve desired outcomes within international relations, provide legitimacy to certain standards or define rules of the game. Such undermining of the authority causes the hegemon to spend more to sustain system's stability and international order – weakening the authority of the one in charge of maintenance of certain order encourages the actors with the breaching motives to act even more so. As a result, this leads to the decrease of hegemon's relative power in comparison to the fast growing states. This is why a hegemon facing decline will still have to face the reality of limited involvement irrespective of its own desires even if it does not attempt to invoke the strategies involving relatively lower costs.

Therefore, if a strategy located on the right side of the axis (hegemony) is not achievable, whilst the other one (declining hegemony) is a result of its inactivity/inertness, a hegemon will be able to choose between the possible options presented on the left side. The left side of the axes depicts two options, from which multilateralism offers lower costs alongside with high involvement, whilst isolationism suggests minimum costs for the system stability and its functioning, although this will lead to cancellation of its status and the privileges/rights associated with it, as well as its impact on formation of international politics.

Within the scopes of this article, multilateralism is regarded as a hegemon's most optimal strategy, which gives the possibility of lowering costs and retaining high degree of involvement at the same time. Negation of the alternative strategy, isolationism is based, on the one hand, on the arguments provided by liberalism that emphasize the challenges related to implementing this strategy considering the level of globalization and interdependency among international actors common for the contemporary age. On the other hand, isolationism is negated based on the logic of structural realism, which considering the fear of jeopardizing peace in a post-hegemonic world and existing uncertainty in the international relations, implies the world states to be dismayed towards other powerful states. Considering this, in case of applying the strategy of isolationism an ex hegemon will not be able to stay unaffected and function peacefully.

However, within the frameworks of this article, strategy of isolationism is still considered as an option a declining hegemon may choose depending on its own judgments and

vision of future development. Choosing between the strategies of isolationism and multilateralism, a hegemon, within a framework of its capabilities should decide if it wants to retain a maximum of its power or involvement. Both of the strategies imply challenges and certain risks that can cause failure.

The challenges associated with isolationism, on the one hand, relate to its implementation, in the age of globalization, while on the other hand - arguments developed by the theory of realism (structural realism) and its offensive wing. In anarchic international relations certain circumstances exist that do not consider isolationism within the framework of rational choices. According to realism, international relations, due to the so called 911 problem, which in case of need considers impossibility to invoke international help against a party breaching the world order, stipulates self-help condition where states rely on their own power capabilities (Mearsheimer, 2001). Therefore, offensive realism believes that there is no notion such as enough power, unless a state becomes a hegemon – no state can feel safe without insuring that it has exceeded in power all other potential opponent states and their alliances. This is why, according to the offensive realism's logic isolation and exclusion from international relations means surrender and satisfaction with status quo, which is a dangerous mistake as in this case the changes in power distribution of the rest of the world stays beyond attention of the former hegemon embodied in its own shell.

Therein, implementing a strategy of isolationism becomes especially dangerous in cases, when formation of multipolar international system is anticipated after the end of a hegemonic international system. Posen (2009) develops similar argument and considers that: "The relatively equal distribution of capabilities in a multipolar world, with three or more consequential powers, produces one basic pattern of behavior: The arithmetic of coalitions influences matters great and small. The overall balance of capabilities, and the military balance in particular, are easily altered in a significant way depending on who sides with whom. Internal efforts cannot accomplish nearly as much change, at such a low cost, in such a short time. ... In a multipolar system, states should lack confidence that significant military buildups can help them much, because other states can combine against them. Diplomacy becomes a respected career again under multipolarity. ... Isolation is perhaps the most dangerous situation in multipolarity, so states will pay close and constant attention to the game of coalition building." (Posen, 2009)

Beyond the scope of offensive realism, a general idea of structural realism also warns about the dangers related to the strategy of isolationism. Realism views international relations as inclined towards conflicts rather than cooperation. Dominion of cooperation within international relations links to a hegemonic international system, which is backed up by the international order supported by a hegemon, a so called hegemonic peace that decreases chances of large scale wars, fosters and protects international standards and rules. This, by enabling repetitive cooperation, formation of regimes and maintenance of stable international system, reduces defection threat and allows peaceful cooperation

to take place (on possibility of cooperation under anarchy see Oye, 1985; Jervis, 1978; Keohane, 1998). If a hegemon decides to apply isolationistic strategy and descends the curtain, the world will not stay the same on the other side of the curtain. Once there is no one responsible for the international system's stability, realism assumes that conflict will prevail cooperation within international relations once again, which will complicate implementation of isolationistic strategy even further. Within anarchic international relations, a hegemon, by creating public goods (such as stable security and economic order), fulfills functions that are similar to the ones of a central government. This, in the well-known confrontation between guns and butter makes it more or less possible for states to increase a share of butter. Therefore, a hegemonic system provides better opportunities to carry out isolationistic politics. Because a hegemon acts as a policeman and the system is stable, isolated state has better chances to retain its peaceful co-existence with the rest of the world. However, if it is a hegemon who chooses the isolationistic strategy, then no one stays in control to provide the international order. Without hegemon's leadership, chances of more or less similarly powerful states to provide international safety through collaborative actions are limited. A motive for a hegemonic state to retain system stability derives from it being a status quo state – it is in hegemon's interest to retain a type of system which rewards it with a status of a hegemon. Without a hegemon, international peace would be a subject to multiple states' collective action, although the probability of it to be successful is low as not all states among powerful ones are status quo states. This means that such states may be interested in existence of conflicts in international system, which may shift a balance of power-relation to their advantage. Realism's logic of functioning of the multipolar system adopts the notion that in anarchic international system, powerful states are expected to hold hostile intentions towards each other. Posen, who reviews the anticipation of the Post-American multipolar system, suggests it is less likely that the states would directly confront each other in a world characterized with the existence of nuclear weapons – possessed by vast majority of powerful states, where the scale of power of confronting states and coalitions is large. In such case, "defense dominance" originates in international relations, as a result of which "the pattern of competition [for power] will look much like an endless series of games played for small stakes. States will want more, but will not wish to court disaster.... competitors likely will believe that the safe way to improve one's relative position is to pursue policies that weaken others. Increasing others' costs when they undertake initiatives will seem wiser than undertaking one's own adventures. John Mearsheimer's [(2001)] "bait and bleed" strategies may become more common. (Posen, 2009)

Bearing in mind the given ideas, realism views that in the post hegemonic age, a perspective for fostering cooperation and safety through collective action is unlikely. A second traditional theory liberalism confronts this argument.

Liberals believe that even though regimes that facilitate cooperation in anarchic international system are formed in the environment where a hegemon exists, they possess a high degree of viability that helps them to continue their existence in a post-hegemonic age. According to Keohane international regimes are "easier to maintain than to create... Regimes may be maintained, and may continue to foster cooperation, even under conditions that would not be sufficiently benign to bring about their creation. Cooperation is possible after hegemony not only because shared interests can lead to the creation of regimes, but also because the conditions for maintaining existing international regimes are less demanding than those required for creating them. Although hegemony helps to explain the creation of contemporary international regimes, the decline of hegemony does not necessarily lead symmetrically to their decay." (Keohane, 1984) Therefore, Keohane views the international regimes that facilitate cooperation among states in different fields to be viable in a post-hegemonic age, as their retention is beneficial for states and the experience generated through their continuous cooperative work at a certain stage forms, on a game theory jargon, a repetitive game experience. This has shaped players to develop awareness of other players' styles and anticipation of their actions that lead to diminishing the challenging factors of cooperation such as uncertainty about other players' motivation and a threat of defection.

Liberalistic viewpoints as such, do not take into consideration the meaning of relative gain in an anarchic international system, which is a foundation for realist theories about cooperation perspectives within the post-hegemonic age. Liberalism deems that the benefit offered in return of cooperation outweighs fear and encourages states to balance conflicting interests to cooperation's advantage. The liberalism's argument is solid when asserting that regimes stimulate international cooperation. It is also well-grounded when they assert that regimes' viability in post-hegemonic age is high and benefits received as a result of cooperation is a good incentive for states to compromise and harmonize conflicting interests. The perspective suggested by liberalism is not guaranteed; it is merely a scenario with a high probability to take place, which is the main flaw of this theory. It can be disputed whether it is reasonable for states to act optimistically whilst relying on a sole probability factor, even if it is high, albeit it is impossible to exclude chances that some states may refer to the pessimistic scenario suggested by realism, which involves a fear of defection and the notion of a relative gain that prevents cooperation. Such estimates put optimistically predisposed states in situation of prisoner's dilemma as benefits acquired through cooperation are beclouded with incurred losses in case of a potential defection. Actions of pessimistically predisposed states influence other states, which otherwise would have acted in an optimistic manner, to become more cautious. Hence, there is a high probability that irrespective of continuous viability, regimes may not be able to overcome tensions conditioned by anarchy and be preserved only in so-called sphere of low politics.¹

¹Low politics is a concept that implies issues that are not absolutely vital to state survival and its security and is considered to be a domain of state warfare. In opposite to low politics, the concept of high politics covers the matters of state's survival and its national security (Nye & Keohane, 1971b).

In such case, the probability is high that the international order formed by a hegemon may develop cracks. This, in the end will lead to its demolition as a desire for cooperation without the policeman maintaining international order may not overcome challenging factors such as a security dilemma, risks of a defection, or obsessive interest in relative power in conditions where the benefits received through cooperation by participants are asymmetric. Once a hegemon decides to lead on to isolationism the world order may become unsafe. In such scenario, it is unlikely that a hegemon will be able to pursue its vital interests peacefully, which in today's world imply not only security of its own borders, but also entails access to other states' resources, which are significantly vital for the provision of sustainable development, competition for international market shares, protection of interests of national companies and products, etc.

Therefore, beyond the logic of realism the success of isolationism in today's world is highly unlikely, from the prism of another traditional theory of international relations, particularly according to the logic of liberalism's complex interdependency theory. In accordance with the increase of globalization and interdependency, more and more factors appear within the vital interests of states, which are beyond their own borders and require involvement in international relations. Therefore, in the contemporary world, for an isolationistic state the provision of its own stability and sustainable development entails accomplishment of complex objectives. Nonetheless, isolationism within this paper is viewed as one of the potential theoretical strategies for a declining hegemon, which is a matter of preference for a particular hegemon when choosing its own future development plan.

According to the axes, the last strategy option for a declining hegemon is multilateralism, which despite its low costs, still offers a high possibility of involvement (multilateralism's degree of involvement is though not as high as it would have been in a hegemon's prime, despite the fact that at the given axes, in terms of involvement it is presented across the strategy of hegemony). The indicated strategy stands out for its dynamics, which requires a particular level of diplomacy in terms of implementation. Moreover, the strategy's success depends on further development of the events and it is hard to predict in the beginning whether it is going to be successful or not.

Strategy of multilateralism implies minimization of costs for a declining hegemon in order to stagnate a comparative power decrease between itself and the rest of the world and to maintain the maximum level of involvement within international relations. To succeed in such endeavor a hegemon, realizing that it will not be able to take up the role of a system's sole guarding policeman, has to clearly define its national interests within the international relations. When it comes to its national interests, hegemon should be ready to cover the costs as well as act unilaterally. However, hegemon should not act on its own and cover the costs on the actions involving all of the rest issues that do not qualify for the category of primary national interests.

National interests of the hegemon are extended to the issues that do not display any direct threat against itself,

but are threatening the whole international system's stability. The reason for this relates to the hegemon's classification with two attributes of power and willingness, implying that a hegemon will lose its status if it refuses to display the willingness to undertake the responsibility for the systems' stability. A hegemon may not feel indifferent towards issues that do not display a direct threat to its national interests as well, however, it should avoid resolving all such issues on its own because it will exhaust its power and accelerate its decline, as well as encourage other states to practice free rides. Therefore, once important and less important issues have been identified, a hegemon's responsibility happens to be a mobilization of the international support to resolve problems that do not represent direct threat to a hegemon, but does represent a threat against entire international order, hence, carries a certain jeopardy against every important actor of international relations. In this case, a hegemon would manage to lower the costs and at the same time, maintain involvement by sustaining the responsibility on international stability.

As mentioned, strategy of multilateralism implies certain challenges, it possesses distinguishable dynamics and as its outcomes depend on how events unfold, it is hard to foretell if it is going to be successful. The challenges relating to this strategy involve precise and clear definition of what represents a direct threat to a hegemon on the one hand, and mobilization of the international support for a multilateral action pertaining to those threats that concern all actors in the system, on the other.

For the declining hegemon, that chooses multilateralism as its foreign policy strategy, it will not be easy to identify those threats in cases of which it will have to act unilaterally as a last resort, or avoid actions to save on costs. A hegemon takes on a responsibility for the system's stability and provision of security beyond its own borders. It acts as a policeman within international system. In order to provide a stability for the international system a hegemon by its own expenses tries to cope against existential threats aimed at the system. Such threats include large-scale wars between big states, spread of nuclear weapon(s), and also, relatively smaller threats that are not direct or existential, but still can lead to system instabilities, such as regional conflicts, international organized crime etc. For a successful accomplishment of a strategy of multilateralism with an aim to save costs, a hegemon in the first place is required to separate the classifications of threats existing in the international system into groups, and then, identify the categories of the threats in cases of which it would act or not act unilaterally.

Classification of the threats can be formulated in three categories, where the first category would include direct threats addressed against the hegemon's own national interests, the second relating to existential threats aimed at the system and the third – non-existential threats directing against the system's stability. Obviously, a hegemon is not able to avoid responsibilities of taking actions against the threats from the first category, also, it will not be able to discharge its liability in relation to the threats from the second category as they directly link to a hegemon's national interests. Besides, hegemon's refusal to respond to the existential threats directed against the system's stability, will

undermine its status by disoperation of a hegemon's core function and suppression of one of the essential attributes of a hegemon, such as willingness to participate in international relations.

Consequently, a hegemon may reject the unilateral action relating to the third category's threats, in other words the non-existential threats directed against the system's stability. However, there might be certain challenges within the process of threat categorization, especially with the third category that should include threats not directed against national interests nor against the existence of the world order. The question is that a hegemon's degree of involvement within international relations' field leaves a small number of issues, which do not intersect with the national interests of the hegemon. Since the prime time of a hegemon's power the national interests have been broadly defined, it will be difficult for a hegemon to detect the threats that shall not intersect with its national interests. As the strategy of multilateralism requires a declining hegemon to save on costs, a hegemon will have to redefine its national interests, which previously demanded merely full control on the processes almost in the entire international system. It will have to define the issues, which represent or do not represent a direct threat against its security-driven national interests and reject the unilateral action in case of the latter one. In the process of threat classification, it is important to concentrate on the security-driven national interests in order to avoid the challenges associated with the threat groups for the first and second categories. The definition of security in the contemporary world involves traditional understanding relating to the physical safety of its territories, as well as political and economic sustainability, which in the end converts into power. Thus, categorization of the threats that directly jeopardize state security can be grouped into the ones that are set against sovereignty (including strategic and political threats) and economic threats. Hence, the first category will include the threats, which contain strategic and economic jeopardies set against a hegemonic state. Whilst the rest of the issues that do not represent existential threats against the international system will fall under the third category for which the responsibility will pertain to the multilateral actions accomplished by the international community or interested actors (as ad hoc alliances).

In addition, to categorization of the threats aiming to identification of them, in case of which a hegemon has to respond unilaterally, the following challenging step involves convincing the international community to act multilaterally in relation to the threats to which a hegemon decides not to act unilaterally for the sake of expenditure minimization.

Therein, a challenge for multilateralism implies so called free-riding practice. A hegemonic international system entails that a hegemon undertakes a whole responsibility for the international order, which allows other states to benefit from the stable international system and apply their efforts towards own development. Whenever, a hegemon, for the sake of minimizing its costs, asks other big states to provide support for the international system's stability it faces difficulties such as convincing the latter ones. The reason behind this, is that other big states get used to the role of free riders, moreover, acting as a responsible citizen of the in-

ternational system requires redistribution of their efforts towards international order, which otherwise would have been used to accelerate the pace of their own growth. Because of this, it is reasonable to expect that big states will tend to remain in the role of free riders as long as it is possible. In the meantime, a hegemon's capacities to provide consolidation of the international community's solidarity for the sake of retention of the international stability is limited. Traditionally, persuasion of second parties to undertake certain actions involves application of either positive or negative incentives. Although, considering the specificity of such occasion, it can be suggested that a hegemon can resort only to positive incentives. A hegemon is not able to restrict other states that have not contributed, to benefit from the stability maintained at a hegemon's expenses.

In addition, a hegemon will not be able to issue any punishment warning to the members of the international community that do not comply with their 'citizenship' duties. Such penalty would invite alienation of big states, turn them into constant challengers of a hegemon's power and its world order, and respectively lead them to incentives relating to formation of an alternative international order, which would accelerate the hegemon's existing decline and collapse of the international order. For this reason, remedies left for a hegemon to provide support from big states within the system involve persuasion and positive incentives only.

When a hegemon tries to obtain certain support from the international community it should send clear-cut messages across and secure a sequential order of its following action asserted by international political shift. A hegemon should clearly demonstrate to the international community an extent of the damage that can be caused to the international stability if the above-mentioned third category issues are ignored, which as consequence will also reflect on every state. A hegemon should send clear messages, so that the big states will not expect a hegemon to cope with common threats unilaterally. If a hegemon corresponds its strategy's asserted shift to the sequential order of actions, then it will be deemed as a clear sign to convince big states that it does not intend to cope with all existent sources of instability in the international system by its own expenses. Since the instability that threatens the world order negatively reflects on the states' security and prosperity, they become interested to act in order to avoid destabilization of the international system. It is interesting that according to the arguments of realism discussed while negating the strategy of isolationism, a post-hegemonic multipolar international system would have less prospects to execute regular successful actions to trigger the big states step up in defense of the international order, however, such prospects are much better in a hegemonic international system. In the case of multilateral system, the states are more or less equal in terms of their capabilities, therefore none of them holds a capacity or legitimacy over others, to lead and guide the mobilization and implementation of collective actions. In a hegemonic international system, even at the stage of a decline the hegemon can perform duties of a leader – it still possesses the appropriate capabilities as well as the legitimacy that corresponds to the author of the international order as well the system's supreme state, whose power is still unimag-

unable to balance. Taking into account the significance of leadership, a hegemonic system offers better prospects for success when conducting collaborative actions. Although, throughout the execution of collective actions a hegemon's leadership is not the only factor for improving the prospects of success. The existence of a hegemon secures the international order and respectively a stable international system, in other words, mitigates the anarchy. The factors, which in anarchy conditions form a certain distrust among the states are suppressed by intensive international cooperation supported by a hegemon within the framework of different regimes presented in a hegemonic international system. Aforementioned factors, unlike the multilateral system, form decent prospects for provision of international stability through execution of collective actions.

To provide international support, apart from persuasion, a hegemon may also refer to the use of positive incentives. Despite the fact that a hegemonic international order provides benefits of peace to all states, its institutions are set up to serve its interests in the first place. Being the most powerful within the system and its creator, a hegemon certainly avails of appropriate privileges and authority. Although, since emerging big states start to grow in power they start to claim their authority and status in the system to match their powers respectively. If a hegemon does not accommodate such interests of rising states it will turn them at some point into system challengers, which is a threat for the system's order and its creator - the hegemon. Therefore, adaptation of institutions, standards and processes within the framework of the international order, which at the end of the day should be done anyway in order to accommodate the rising powers and save the system, in this case, could be used by a hegemon as a positive incentive in exchange for the support from big states of the system to provide international order collectively. The rising states of the system will become worthwhile stakeholders of the international system in exchange for the responsibility to protect it.

It should be noted that obtaining the support from big states to provide the order for the international system is contradictory in a sense that although saving costs for a hegemon will help to maintain its power, from another perspective it will undermine its authority and legitimacy to benefit from special privileges. If other states of the system get involved in maintenance of the international order and bear certain expenses, then within the framework of international order they may request higher privileges in reward for their efforts. Overall, a hegemon's decrease of authority in terms of providing the stability to the system will lead to weakening its privileges, which will be questioned more and more often by the rising big states. A hegemon's efforts to decrease costs in terms of providing multilateral actions will result in gradual limiting of its involvement. While interacting with enhanced rising states, it will be much harder for a hegemon to achieve the outcomes it used to achieve in the prime of its power.

Hence, even though in the framework of the strategy of multilateralism a hegemon is able to decrease its expenses and save its power, the progressive fall is triggered by another variable - involvement. Respectively, the multilateralism's strategy does not allow a hegemon to preserve its

original form. For this reason, it may be considered as an unsuccessful strategy. Despite this, multilateralism is still perceived as the most optimal strategy for a declining hegemon. It is right to state that implementation of the strategy of multilateralism, which aims at lowering the costs, triggers a gradual fall of involvement, however, as it has already been stated in case of the strategy of declining hegemony, hegemon would still not be able to retain its high degree of involvement even if maintaining its usual expenses intact. Therefore, as none of the strategies offer retention of a high degree of involvement to a hegemon, the best possible strategy left is multilateralism, which suggests retention of relative power, on the one hand, by decreasing costs of a hegemon, whilst on the other hand by increasing the costs for other states as international stability within this strategy is provided multilaterally. In conclusion, the strategy of multilateralism can be evaluated through long-term and short-term scopes. From a relatively short-term standpoint, the aim is to retain hegemony for the maximum period of time, although the overall goal of the strategy entails retention of as much power as possible for a post-hegemonic world, where with no policeman to maintain order, power becomes even more valued resource in order to secure states' national interests ranging from survival to welfare and social security.

Conclusion

Within the framework of the article foreign policy strategies of a declining hegemon were classified based on the variables that empirically represent the two attributes of a hegemon – power and willingness, which, in their turn, were revealed according to the definitions of hegemony presented in the literature of international relations. The two variables are costs and involvement. Costs reflect a hegemon's power and in terms of a specific strategy, measure the amount of power to be spent while implementing it. Involvement, bearing in mind willingness for the active participation in international relations, measures the outcomes of such participation in terms of attainment of the hegemon's initial goals. Therefore, the variables – costs and involvement – reflecting the attributes of a hegemon, with respect to alternative strategies, help to identify to what extent a hegemon implementing potential strategies associates with or deviates from certain standards, which are suggested by a hegemon's classification given in the scope of the international relations theory.

The article has discussed two foreign policy strategies of a declining hegemon, the isolationism and multilateralism, which were revealed through identifying the different possible balances of the mentioned variables – costs and involvement. Isolationism offers a retention of a relative power by canceling the costs associated with hegemon's involvement in international relations, whilst multilateralism offers a declining hegemon a possibility to maintain high level of involvement in international relations while decreasing costs that enable retention of its relative power. For this reason, in the scope of the article, multilateralism is regarded

as the most optimal foreign policy strategy for a declining hegemon. However, slow decline of involvement implied in the strategy of multilateralism as well as the rise of the new power centers conditioned by the stable economic and security order introduced by a hegemon, in the end, even in the case of successful multilateralism means a hegemon's fall but through slower decline than in case of any other foreign policy strategy hegemon could follow. Therefore, the aims of strategy of multilateralism can be split in two parts: a relatively short-term aim to extend a hegemony, and a long-term aim to maintain power for a post-hegemonic world.

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